

Interview with
Ernesto Galarza,
Director of Research and Education,
National Agricultural Workers' Union, A.F.L.,
December 23, 1956,
San Jose, California

There are two categories of camps in which the braceros are kept. One is the large modern camp, usually located very close to some large city; easily accessible; recently built; and more often than not equipped with a clinic. These are the show-camps of California, and if you are interested I could list some of those. Visitors are welcome. By and large, the health conditions in those camps are pretty close compliance with the State laws. Then, there are the fringe camps which I reported for the most part in my study. Now, the fringe camps, in size, would run from 25 or 30 braceros, to maybe 200 or 300, sometimes more. The health problems that you are interested in would be found very largely in those camps. But the main problem is to find the camps before you can find the problems, because these fringe camps are very often mobile camps. Very recently the U.S. Department of Labor, through one of its California agencies, admitted for the first time that I know of, that a great many of these camps are never located by their agents. So, if you want to frame a problem and go after it, and do something about it, your problem would be to locate the fringe camps. That is where your health problem is serious. If you have a grant to bring health services or to study the health problems of braceros in fringe camps, and you need a tracker, I will be very glad to help you.

Now, you will find growers who have only one National. And when that happens, you will find the National housed in a garage, perhaps in a tent, in a small cottage on the grounds of his employer. That is a bracero who is practically impossible to locate or reach. This year, at the peak of the season, we had a little over 100,000 braceros in California and of those 100,000, I would doubt that more than 5 or 6,000 were single employees; that is braceros who are hired out to a single employer. The rest were in camps large and small.

I would venture to say that it would be next to impossible to define a research or assistance health program for the bracero who works alone for some employer. He is lost until he shows up at the contracting center and is sent home. There is this to be kept in mind: generally speaking, when the small farmer deals directly with the bracero, you are apt to find a little more consideration and thoughtfulness and care about the bracero. That is pretty much because the bracero is in closer touch with the family. Very often the employer works side-by-side with the bracero. When this relationship disappears, as it does in the large groups, and the men are housed in large camps, some of which are thrown together and improvised, the health problem becomes acute. So, I would say you have three classifications of braceros: those in the large modern camps, the show-places; those who are in the fringe camps; and those who work with a single employer. I would say it is the middle group that presents a health problem.

Workmen's Compensation is a provision of the State Law. To put it briefly, the bracero who is injured on-the-job is covered by all the provisions of California state law for Workmen's Compensation. If the bracero makes his case known, in the event the employer doesn't make it known to the proper authorities, he gets exactly the same kind of treatment as the domestic worker. There is no discrimination against the bracero as far as state law is concerned, for on-the-job injuries. The problem there is: to be sure that the bracero understands that he is covered by the State law and, in the event he is injured, that his case is immediately brought to the attention of the proper authorities. Which doesn't always happen. Often, either the employer doesn't know of the accident because the boss or contractor doesn't report it; or the Mexican worker doesn't know enough to report it himself to his employer. There may be any one of a number of reasons why the bracero's case is not properly registered.

In my report, I mentioned cases of braceros who are injured on the job who are handled rather brusquely by the crew leader or the contractor, and denied the privileges to which they are entitled. That is merely a break-down of the legal system. The remedy for that, of course, is better compliance with the law.

The American companies handle the non-occupational insurance on a competitive basis. They make arrangements directly with the Mexican Government. The Mexican government authorizes the employer to check-off, deduct, the amount of the premium from the weekly pay checks. That is turned over to the companies; and from that they finance the non-occupational insurance.

The worker is not allowed to go to any doctor he chooses. The physicians are selected, they are named by the companies. The bracero working in a certain camp understands, that if he is injured off-the-job, or becomes sick, he can go only to this particular doctor.

Theoretically, when the bracero first enters the country he is supposed to be briefed at the Reception Center on his off-the-job insurance. I found out that practically very few braceros are informed in advance of their arrival at the point of employment. After they arrive there, they are informed that there is a doctor in the community and if any of them are injured off-the-job or get sick they can go to him. When the time actually comes, they go to the boss for advice on the matter, they are taken to the doctor in the locality, or given his name and address and told to get there themselves. Very often the bracero has to find the doctor himself. I found camps where the bracero would have to make a 20 mile trip to see the doctor. Frequently he doesn't go, either because the contractor or the crew boss discourages him, or because he is too sick to move out of the camp; or because he doesn't know his way there; or because when he gets to the doctor, he finds that the doctor can't speak Spanish. These are all reasons why the non-occupation insurance program breaks down.

The concept of folk medicine which the contractors have is more important in this case than that of the braceros. A bracero who gets a good sound belly-ache, knows it; and he likes to go to a real doctor here, even if he may have frequented a witch doctor back home. But he runs up against the folkways of the contractors. Let me give you an example: There was a contractor over in Woodland, who had a boy, a Mexican bracero, a kid 17 or 18 years of age, who was operated on for appendicitis. The appendectomy was performed at 11:00 A.M. of a certain day. At 8 o'clock the following morning he was back in the camp and the contractor was telling him to get up and get dressed and go to work. The reasons the contractor urged upon this boy were as follows:

1. He had had bellyaches and he found that the best cure for them was to go out, lift heavy boxes, and get himself warmed up.
2. If he stayed in bed any length of time he would develop cramps and paralysis; therefore it was to his best interest to get out and get busy.
3. The particular kind of operation he had had lead to all sorts of complications, which would make him a very sick boy when he got back to Mexico.

That's a sample of the contractor's folklore of medicine. So, this kid was forced to get up and get himself dressed. If it had not been for his friends, who intervened and made him go back to bed, and assumed the expenses of feeding him for 3 or 4 days, he would have been forced back to work within 24 hours after the appendectomy. This you will find among many of the Spanish-speaking contractors of California. And it shows their attitude toward the bracero.

The International Agreement prohibits the participation of employment agencies, and a contractor is an employment agency as defined by law. However, I have found contractors participating in the program, in practically every major aspect of the handling of Mexican braceros from the time they arrive at the place of employment. For one thing, they act as improvised doctors--medical consultants. I found one camp where a contractor had a jar of blue pills on a shelf in the kitchen. Any bracero complaining of illness got one pill if it was a headache; two pills if it was rheumatism; three if it was acute indigestion; four pills if he got sunstroke; and so on until, I think the maximum dose was seven pills--I think probably for a heart attack. I took one. Tasted like sugar. I don't know what I complained of. Must have been a pain in the neck!

Labor contractors are found in connection with practically all fringe camps. You see, the labor contractor has his hand in this bracero program because he is a very useful citizen to the employer. Many, many employers in California do not speak Spanish and besides, they are reluctant to deal directly with the Mexican. They don't want much to do with him. So, the contractor pays the wages; handles the food; provides the housing; carries the men back and forth;

and provides other services. So, he becomes a very necessary intermediary between the employer and the bracero. That is where he gets his licks in. Many employers don't know one-tenth of what goes on in the camps. What's in it for the contractor? Oh, a series of minor and major rackets.

The main services which the contractor renders to the employer are:

1. Their meals. The mess hall concession is the principal racket.
2. Transportation of the braceros to and from the job.
3. Their housing. For this he is usually paid by the employer. There is a contract between the contractor and the employer, and in this sense he is an agent of the employer. But once he gets the men in camp, the contractor has a good deal of leeway.

Some of the so-called services are, for instance, the sale of soft drinks. I have found camps where Coca-Cola's were sold for 15¢ a bottle. I found a camp over near Tracy where they sold the men 3¢ stamps for 5¢. Many of these camps provide stray women to the braceros. And I even went so far as to check on the rates. I went into the commercial aspects of the trade in temporary women, and I found that the bracero is even exploited in this line. The contractor gets a rake-off because he organizes the business. So it is a series of large and small rackets based upon a control which is handed to the contractors by the employer. Nine cases out of ten, the employer doesn't know what is going on; he doesn't much care; as long as the men are on the job when he wants them and in the number required. The rest of it is pretty much up to the contractor.

\$1.75 for meals per day is the maximum fixed by law. In reality, this is a cost figure. That is to say, the contractor is allowed to charge only the cost of the service. But it is my judgment that, at least in the camps which I visited during the course of that survey, the average cost per day, per man, for three meals was somewhere in the neighborhood of 50¢. I saw the food and I ate it. I often went into a camp just at suppertime and sat down with the men and moved out awfully fast as soon as the meal was finished because I was a stranger, I would be asked questions, and I didn't want to be, except by braceros themselves.

Let me give you a typical daily ration. I checked this with a group of braceros near Stockton. I spent two days with them. In the morning they got a cup of coffee, two tortillas and an egg. That was breakfast at 5 o'clock in the morning. Then at 12 o'clock they had a cold lunch: two sandwiches--lettuce and tomato, and peanut butter--an orange, and coffee. For the evening meal, they had: soup, coffee again, four tortillas, rice and beans.

Somebody's making a lot of money.

Now, in these modern camps, particularly after the sustained criticism we have been making of them for the last 4 or 5 years, you will find the menus much improved. But there again I would make the flat statement that in these show-place camps, they are not being served meals at cost, which the law requires. Somebody is making money--making a business out of something which the law says should not be a business for profit.

You have some health problems deriving from the kind of food these men are served, although the cases of food poisoning in the last 2 or 3 years that have come to my notice have declined. I think that on the whole the employers have been impressed with the danger of food poisoning through inadequate feeding. I would say that in the last few years there've been fewer cases of that kind than there were before. But, what you get is a very considerable decline in the energy of these men. They are used to a staple Mexican diet. They come up here for 6 weeks or 12 weeks and are suddenly asked to eat a cold lunch of two sandwiches--peanut butter, and lettuce and tomato. Well, I made it a practice when I was making this study to visit fields after the workday was over. I would go to places where the men had eaten lunch, and I would pick up bags containing the complete lunch. The men would leave the food there. First, they weren't used to a cold lunch. Secondly, they are not accustomed to sandwiches of the kind I've described. They would develop digestive trouble on such a diet, not eating half the time, and still called upon to do a strenuous day's work, 8-10-12 hours a day, 7 days a week, including Sundays.

The men often try to keep body and ^{soul} together by buying candy bars, etc. Quite often a group of braceros in a camp will pool their cash and one man will

shop for the group, once a week, maybe twice.. They will walk to the nearest town, 3 or 4 miles over and back, to buy mostly milk. They have a great yearning for milk. They will buy this milk on their own. Many braceros told me it costs them from 50 to 75¢ a day, in addition to their deducted charge for food, in order to supplement their camp diet.

The large campos have made an effort to provide the Mexicans with tortillas and the basic diet they are used to in Mexico, supplemented by some American types of food. But, on the whole, the large camps have done much better in this respect. You see, the problem of diet in the finge camps is also a result of the fact that the contractor controls the commissary in the camps. For instance, I found one contractor down in Southern California, who did not provide cool drinking water to the braceros in the fields, as he is supposed to be obliged to do by the terms of the agreement. After this was reported to me, I watched this crew at noon, and I saw why no water was being served. About 11:30 in the morning, the contractor's own pick-up truck came up to the field loaded with ice cold Cokes. These men, of course, were forced to buy them because they had no water available. Then, I saw, in the Salinas Valley, a variation of this same technique; only in this case the contractor did not fail to provide drinking water. He provided it all right. But when the crew was on the north end of a half mile furrow, the water was on the south end; and when the men approached the south end, the water was moved to the north end. The result was that when the noon hour came around the men were quite thirsty and would buy Coca-Cola's at 10¢ a shot--double the price. They would have had to pay in town.

There is the old theory that if you have a mule the best way to get good work out of it is to feed it good grain. That is the minimum thinking you would expect of these employers. I think many employers realize that at \$1.75, a bracero can be well fed; I'm speaking of feeding in large numbers. I suppose many employers just assume \$1.75 taken out of the braceros' pockets daily is spent completely on food. But if they troubled to check the accounts of the commissary, I think they would find that a good portion of the \$1.75 goes into profit. This is a situation which the employers could remedy if they had the will to do it.

Some say the crux of the problem is worker representation. In the present agreement there is a provision that the workers may select their own spokesmen--as the agreement says, "for the purpose of maintaining the contract." I don't know what that means. It doesn't mean enforce the contract. These agreements are negotiated by diplomats who as usual make up their own language. And since I am in the labor business and I deal in contracts, I know that once a contract is signed the major concern of both parties is usually to enforce the contract. That's what you do with contracts. But not in this case. The braceros may elect their representatives to maintain the contract. Legally, I don't know what effect that word has. To me it means nothing.

In the second place, the braceros are supposed to elect their representatives, but no election machinery is provided for in the Agreement. Moreover, if there were such machinery, what would you find in a camp of 300 men, let's say. First of all, men from half a dozen parts of Mexico with the village mentality very strongly predominant. Perhaps a dozen or so men coming from X village and they would form a tight little nucleus, and they would have a spokesman or a tacit leader to whom they would look for advice and for guidance, but they would have very little to do with the other groups in the camp. In other words, in a camp of 200 or 300 men you would find a dozen or more little groups all suspicious of one another--having no previous experience in organizations--not knowing what an election is--not having the slightest notion of how to get to first base in organizing a camp and appointing a committee to represent them. These men have no experience with grievances or grievance procedure. Consequently, that clause in the agreement is absolutely non-operative. And moreover, many braceros have told me over the last 5 or 6 years, and I have talked to thousands by this time, that when they have tried to appoint a committee to settle a grievance with an employer or contractor, immediately their spokesman are picked off, and either transferred to another camp, or sent back to Mexico. Being elected a representative is equivalent to being an agitator to these people.

Usually the bracero makes his complaint known first of all to the field boss, and if the field boss for one reason or another can't handle the complaint--if for instance he's faced with 25 or 30 men who simply won't pick that morning

because the wage is too low--then he will call in the contractor; and if the contractor finds he can't handle it, usually he will telephone the field representative of the Growers' Association and they buzz around to these camps as grievance settlers. It's only in the fourth remove that the bracero has a chance to get his complaint before the Compliance Officer--if he knows who he is, and if he can find him. Chances are he won't know either.

You ask if there is any malice ~~aforethought~~ in making up camps of different groups, as I have described. Specifically, no. It just works out that way. But in a general sense, yes. Now, let me try to make myself very clear. When I say "specifically, no," I mean that when a group of braceros are hired in the El Centro Reception Center for a certain employer in the Santa Clara Valley, I don't think that anyone sits down and says we will take 15 men from Morelos, 15 from Sinaloa, 15 from Guanajuato, and so forth. I think that it just happens that way. But why does it happen that way? It happens that way because the basic policy in the bracero program is to bring Mexican workers to the U.S. who are green, who are drawn from the reservoir of labor in Mexico that has the characteristics of tractability, humility, ductility, amenability...^{how} Think of all the fine words you can that will describe a man who doesn't know to defend himself. That's the bracero in Mexico.

They estimate they have a reservoir of 2,000,000 such braceros in Mexico. So, wherever you dip, provided you dip low enough, you are bound to get a cross section of people who come from these remote villages and rural areas where the mentality of the peasant, stemming from God knows how many centuries, is one in which a man has been beaten and kicked so often that he remains silent in the face of the grossest injustices. And above all, very suspicious of all except those from his own village.

What is the basis for selection? There is no initial selection actually in Mexico; it is an open door. Any Mexican worker who wishes to apply for a contract may do so. There are no limitations on applicants. Oh, there is a lot of graft, of course. The selection starts at the Reception Center, at the contracting station in Mexico. That is where selection sets in. There are various screening processes. Security screening, health screening, screening by the Mexican authorities, and finally the screening by the representative of the employer who is down there to select the most likely looking workers. The guys with the heftiest muscles, the most callouses and the most droopy expressions. Those are the characteristics they want. So on they come. Then there is another selection process at the reception center. There the actual contract is signed. Up to that moment the bracero is not contracted; he is only a candidate for a job; but once the employers' representative fingers him, offers him a job, then he's hired and there he signs a contract. That is the procedure.

There is one thing I want to say, and I should have said it at the beginning. The health level of the bracero is higher than that of the wetback, because the bracero starts with a medical screening process which the wetback never had. There still are a few wetbacks, by the way. I don't think I have found many camps of braceros where I didn't spot at least one or two wetbacks, mingled in with the braceros. But the number of wetbacks has declined drastically in California since 1954. The reason is that the number of braceros has increased. Increased enormously, to over 100,000 in 1956.

I can only speculate on the future of the program but I can tell you what I think. I don't know what is going to happen; I can only read the signs. As I see them, the most interesting indications are the following ones: the large employers in California, the corporation ranches who were responsible for the bulk of employment of wetbacks and also use the largest proportion of braceros, have apparently reacted very strongly to the publication of my report. They are behaving as if they are afraid that more of this is coming and this report has placed them in the same light that our previous criticism against them had done with respect to the wetbacks. Our union doesn't mind taking the credit for the complete reversal on the policy of wetback employment. We created a climate of public opinion in this state which was so hot, that the corporation ranches finally decided that they couldn't justifiably continue to hire wetbacks, so they decided to shift very swiftly to the bracero, thinking they would have a free field with the braceros. Well, they haven't. This report has attracted a considerable amount of attention, both in this country and in Mexico.

Coincidentally with it (I won't say there is cause and effect here), the big growers have started experimenting with Japanese. They have brought in several hundred Japanese by air, directly from the Japanese islands, for employment in agriculture. The Department of Labor has certified the need for them, at the same time they were turning down Mexican nationals. What is the purpose of this? My theory is that they are putting on a dry-run, an experiment, they are taking soundings. And if they can work it out economically, if they find they can bring in Japanese in large numbers by air, if facilities are available, and if they can nick the Japanese themselves for transportation costs without running any risks themselves, by this time next year they will be running in several thousand, perhaps, let us say, 25 or 30,000 Japanese. Now what would be the purpose of that? It's very obvious. The bracero is Spanish-speaking, and, by and large, he can establish contact with the local community. There are lots of people in the communities who speak his language. But when you bring in Japanese, the first thing you notice is that California has very few Japanese colonies in rural areas with which the Japanese will mingle the way the Mexican can. Also, there are very few Japanese-speaking organizers in the labor movement. And so, by reason of sociological barriers and language barriers, they will have a much more isolated labor force than they do with the bracero. So, one of two things may happen. Either they may find that due to the tremendous opposition of labor in this country to the use of Filipinos and Japanese, they will simply have to do a better job of complying with the International Agreement and continue using braceros. Or they may find ways of overriding this opposition and gradually substituting the Filipino and Japanese for the bracero. It is within the realm of possibility that if things work out in the latter direction, a year from now--I won't say there won't be any braceros, but not in the same numbers, in the same areas, and not working to the same degree.

The situation is changing rapidly. I do know that up to now the only opposition the growers have met in the Japanese trial-run is from the labor movement. They have met no opposition or criticism from the Department of Labor, or Department of Justice; both departments have gone right along. At the moment, the Federal agencies are taking the position that this is just a small experiment and will probably never go beyond 1,000 Japanese. I don't believe it. I believe it's a trial-run to test the machinery. If it turns out to be economical, they will expand it, and to that same degree the Mexican program will shrink. Then I foresee the revival of the wetback problem. The same braceros who've gotten the hang will start sneaking back in large numbers; and we will have competition between the Japanese and the Mexican wetback. And that will be an interesting circus.

Theoretically, there is nothing in the agreement which prohibits affiliation of braceros with our union. We have tried for nearly 10 years to get a categorical statement from both governments to that effect. We have never been able to get it written into the agreement; but we have never been told by either government that the nationals do not have such a right. That right is recognized. But it has never been made effective. We have organized some braceros. They have joined our unions, but that has brought up problems which are themselves, pretty complicated.

Will the employers' representatives at the screening centers hire anyone with any sophistication in the labor movement in Mexico? Not if they can help it!

We take this position: There are enough domestic farm workers in this country, if the labor market were properly organized, to provide all the manpower necessary to move all of California's crops promptly and economically. We have never taken the position that the recruiting of foreign workers should be prohibited. On the contrary, we have said there should be in existence some machinery between governments, so that in case of a national emergency, in case of war, if it actually turned out we did not have enough manpower to harvest our crops, the U. S. could promptly turn to the Mexican government, or the Japanese government for that matter, and say, "We need manpower, please let us have it." But, that is only for an emergency. The fact is that this program started as an emergency measure and has been going since 1942 as an "emergency program." So we've had a "15 year crisis" in American agriculture so far as manpower is concerned.

The growers, the corporation farmers, and the U. S. Department of Labor simply will not face certain facts. One of them is that if the Federal Government had spent on the organization of the domestic labor market the amount of money that it has spent--millions and millions of dollars--in subsidizing cheap labor for the corporation farmers of the Southwest, we could have today a very efficient, very orderly, domestic labor market. We could have sufficient manpower to organize from reserve pools practically on instant notice, and have those jobs available for our own citizens. But if we've learned anything in the last 15 years, it is this: that the corporation farmers of the Southwest, particularly those in California, aided and abetted, in collusion, with certain agents of the Department of Labor, the people who run the so-called Employment Security Bureau--which to us is an Employment Insecurity Bureau--do not want an organized labor market. They want a chaotic labor market in agricultural labor. They want exactly the kind of labor market the building trades had 30 years ago, the railroads had 50 years ago. Those anomalies were corrected only after workers got organized and stopped the chaos. They've still got it chaotic in agriculture and they want it chaotic. If the Federal government ever makes up its mind to spend, let's say in the course of 10 years, the same amount of money it spent on subsidization of the Mexican program, and spends it intelligently, the domestic labor market can be regularized. There is no question about it. I have seen estimates of how much has been spent, but they were unofficial, so I cannot quote them to you. But, I would say roughly that in the last 15 years, possibly 30 to 35 million dollars, on the bracero program.

The amount of paper work alone in this program is like the amount of paper work that overwhelms any bureaucracy. The particular bureaucracy that runs this program has this enormous advantage: it is small. Thank God for that. But because it is small it cannot cope with the amount of paperwork required and do it adequately. For instance, every bracero is supposed to check with a Compliance Officer the day his contract terminates, the day he starts on his way back to Mexico, to see whether his contract has been complied with, whether he has any grievances pending, wages overdue, or anything of that kind. Well, I sat in my car observing the labor pool office that the growers maintain over in Stockton, last fall, and I saw one Compliance Officer inside the building and I counted that day 26 Greyhound busses leaving that terminal, each with some 50 or 60 men. That means, one Compliance Officer theoretically checked with each individual--1500 braceros--checked his papers; asked whether he had any grievances or violations to report; checked his wage receipts; found out whether he had been overcharged on his insurance and what not. And having duly checked 1500 men, and finding absolutely nothing was wrong, saying all right "You may go back to Mexico." You have to be awfully stupid to believe a thing like that.

The growers are the great political power in the state. And you won't be able to do much about that until the labor movement decides to do a really thorough job of organizing farm labor. Until it does the political power of the farmers will be unchecked.

It is really a miracle that we have been able to bring about even such slight reforms as we have in the last five years. It has been due to this constant, everlasting, dingy criticism of which we are the source and fountainhead. Our union provided all the publicity, all the facts, that went into the campaign to stop the wetback racket. Gladwin Hill, for example, would come to us for information and we would give it to him. He would write a series of five devastating articles that absolutely shook the Southwest. We have been the source of that, as we have been of information on the braceros. It's not a job of organizing, which is our real business, but a job of public information; but it has been so persistent, so impressive that it has made a dent even on more recalcitrant growers: growers who 2 years ago wouldn't have believed it possible. So now, they are looking for Japanese. If we make up our minds to do a job on the Japanese program, we may find them going to Tibet for the next contingent of workers.

I do not know how the off-the-job insurance doctors are chosen. They are selected by the companies and I know that where a doctor is available, who speaks Spanish or perhaps has a Spanish speaking nurse, it seems to me he is given priority by the company. But as to exactly how they do it, how they choose the doctor, what the criteria are, I haven't the slightest idea. In my studies, I have found one Spanish-speaking doctor, and one with a Spanish-speaking

nurse. And one extraordinarily fine young doctor, who had neither command of Spanish nor command of a Spanish speaking nurse, but who was studying Spanish at night in order to make himself understood.

Can the contractor system be controlled? One thing that could be done is to hire the men as employees of the association or the rancher, and thereby fix the responsibility for what is happening onto the employer. But, there you raise a very interesting matter of tradition, and we must be dutiful to tradition, mustn't we? The tradition in California is that the contractor plays a multiple role. He has economic functions. He has certain moral functions, or immoral ones, to be more precise, and he also has a legal function, or legal dysfunction. This is a very important point. His legal dysfunction is this--it is to the advantage of the employer quite often to create confusion as to who is the employer, he or the contractor. Very often this is a crucial point, particularly when there has been a violation of the law of some kind. As long as there is some doubt in the minds of authorities as to who was the employer in this particular instance--was it the grower, the contractor, the sub-contractor?--all kinds of things are possible. That is the psychology of the situation and the growers don't want responsibility pin-pointed. So it is very natural to shift from wetback to bracero and keep the same man who has served throughout the years. This is a traditional service the Spanish-speaking contractor gives to the employer--to help him create this confusion as to who really is the employer. And this confusion arises time and time again in the administration of the braceros' contracts.

You often hear the statement made by the bracero that he is worse off than the wetbacks. I never raised this question, I never commented on it, but I got it from them quite often. The bracero would say, "Really, when you come to think about it, we are not as well off as the wetback," and many of them spoke from experience, many of them having been wetbacks! They could change jobs, but now they can't. Now it is a violation of their contract, a violation of the International Agreement, to shift their employment without permission.

You ask if the 100,000 braceros in California annually are the same men over and over again, or do they represent new blood? When the employers find braceros whom they consider to be very good workers, they will just keep on renewing the contracts. However, this isn't true of the mass of the braceros. This is true only of selected individuals who, for instance, may be given a priority card so that in returning the following year, they will be given preference in obtaining a contract. Then, you get another kind of stability, for example, in the Imperial Valley where large farms using these braceros for 5, 6, or 7 years have developed fairly well-trained crews, for example, in melon-picking. They will arrange to have these men returned to the same place year after year, so you get that kind of stability also. But, in a crop like tomatoes, the turnover is large and fast; and if you are thinking of the problem in relation to health services, you have exactly the same situation. You go into an area like Tracy, for instance, in early October; you may have as many as 20,000 braceros picking tomatoes; six weeks later you have 2,000 or 1500.

I don't think these problems are insuperable by any means. At the moment what seems to me to be insuperable is to persuade the Federal authorities to get rid of certain people in Washington who make things difficult. The judicious firing of two or three high officials in the Department of Labor would do a world of good to make these technical health problems, civil liberties, economic problems, a great deal less insuperable. Changing administrations isn't the answer. This is a bipartisan problem. It's been true under the Democrats. It's been true under the Republicans. These same people have been operating in this manner since 1942.

The Bureau of Employment Security is charged with the administration of the program. It is a part of the Department of Labor and they work very closely of course with the Employment Department of California, which intervenes in this program through the Farm Placement Service in Sacramento and its dozens and dozens of field agents.

The Department of Agriculture used to run the program, but at the moment they have nothing to do with it; but they would like to, because it would mean a considerable chunk of Federal money to administer the program, and more jobs for more deserving Republicans in agriculture.

The Department of Justice plays a very minor role. They are in charge of the security check down at the border. They have to be informed when a bracero breaks his contract. A report has to be filed with the Department of Justice immediately, and then they go out to pick up the guy and process him. But these are matters of law enforcement rather than economic administration.

To be utterly frank with you, I would suggest that if you have money to spend on health problems in California of a minority group, that you try to work out a program for the shoestring communities of the west side of the Central Valley. These are communities of our own domestic refugees, many of whom have been displaced by the braceros and the wetback; and have moved over to the Piedmont--a stretch of some 300 miles from Los Baños down to the Tehachapi Range. They have set up these shoestring communities--just long rows of shacks, tents, huts, and beat-up trailers. This is a rather stable population. Economically they are about on a par with the bracero if not with the wetback. They are English speaking communities. Some are Negroes, some are Mexican, some are composed of dust bowl refugees or their descendants. This is something you can bite into and continue biting into without the danger that the problem will be snatched from between your teeth by somebody conferring over in Tokyo, for instance. I don't mean to suggest that if there are braceros or Japanese whose health needs are not being taken care of, they shouldn't be taken care of. They should be, by all means. I have met enough cases in camps where the men were in a very, very bad condition. They are as entitled to good medical attention as anybody else. But the point is that you have administrative problems you have to hurdle before you can get at these men.

Let me point out something that I have told students from U. C., from U.C.L.A., from Stanford, who have been sent to me by friends of mine who teach there. Serious students, all of them candidates for Ph. D.'s, who have wanted badly to do basic studies in this field. I feel in all honesty I have to tell them this, and this applies to your project very, very clearly. This is an area in which there is a previous issue: an issue of access to information. For 15 long years the Federal and State agencies administering this program have been doing it knowing full well that the primary purpose of the bracero program is to cut wages in agriculture in this country, and to prevent organization of domestic workers. This is the ulterior purpose. But they can't say so, so they have recourse to something that is becoming a prevalent evil in our government--the attitude that public agencies who have information have the right to hold it, to sit on it, and not release it. That has been our problem. Now if you set up a project to study the health needs of the bracero you are immediately up against this fact: the Federal and State agencies and the Mexican government and the U.S. government and the corporation farmers of the Southwest are all unanimously agreed that there is no problem. They will show you the International Agreement and the insurance contracts; and they will stop there. That is their evidence that there is no problem. Now the minute you assume there is a problem and want to go into the field to bring help to these people, to take care of them, to see that they get proper medical treatment, you are going to have the problem we have had--of documenting the problem, of proving that the problem exists. This is a political problem. This is not a sociological problem or an economic problem, or an historical problem; this is a political problem.

Now, if the University of California wants to give an interdisciplinary research team a real experience and if you really want to set up a program to study and define the health needs of the braceros in the fringe camps, and if the University of California is willing to give you full support to go where the information is to which you are entitled as serious students, then you are going to be getting somewhere. But this is what you will find. You assume there is a fringe camp which I've taken you to see, let us say, over here in the Delta country. I have taken you, let us suppose, to a camp where there are 50 braceros and five of them are sick. The camp is a dump. The men are receiving pink pills for every sort of ailment. Here is a legitimate problem. But you will first have to go into a battle royal with (a) the Farm Employment Service of the state of California; (b) The Bureau of Employment Security, Region 10, working out of San Francisco; (c) The U.S. Department of Labor; (d) The Mexican Consul, and the Mexican government that stands behind him, to force them to admit (a) that there is a camp at that particular spot; (b) that the camp is a dump and should be closed; and (c) that there are sick men in it. If you get over these hurdles and establish these facts, then, you may go in with your

doctor and take care of a guy suffering from an acute bellyache.

You see, your assumption is that there is a problem, and therefore you want to bring such a program into existence. The others do not share your assumption. This is the whole point.

Now, maybe the local health departments are above this kind of political storm and strife. I wouldn't know. I have had very little to do with the health departments of California. I've never reported these cases to them because we have an International Agreement which specifies very, very clearly to whom to go with complaints and information. We have had no recourse directly to the health authorities.

I will tell you what will happen if you find for instance, that a local health officer in Santa Clara County, or San Mateo County, is advised that there is a camp at X crossroads, with such and such conditions and your health officer does make an inspection and finds your reports are true. I'll tell you what happens right away. The camp is closed and moved to another location. So then you face the choice: you will become assistant Compliance Officers, chasing down these "migratory camps" which has been my function for, lo, these many years; or perhaps you have some other device by which you can nail down the camp and keep it there and bring in your health authorities; define the problem; prove that it does exist; and then appeal to some agency to come in and render actual medical services. Your whole premise is that there is a problem and the premise of the combined government agencies and all the growers who support them, is that there is no problem. When that happens you have a political issue, not a scientific one. The first barrier when you think you have located a problem is that you can't get at the information officially. For instance, if you go to the Farm Placement Service and ask for a list of all the farmers in the area who employ Mexican braceros, they will say "Uh, uh. You can't have them."

Some Farm Placement Representatives, and some Compliance Officers will, of course, be cooperative. I won't mention their names, because I don't want to get them into trouble. I don't want to discourage you from undertaking this, at all. In fact, I am delighted that you, and your colleagues, and your University have an interest in this. This helps the bracero. If it doesn't help anybody else, it will help him. This is one more group of people in this country who are interested in his welfare. And he needs it. He needs the interest of people like you and your colleagues. So all the information you can get and assemble and publicize in a persuasive form is all to the good. But, I am taking the liberty of pointing out to you that you are stepping into a very controversial field in which at times you will need to slug. You will be ordered out of camps. You will be told that you are a liar because you say you were in a certain camp on a certain night, you saw such and such, and you report it back to the University, and three days later the camp wasn't there. What are you doing going around, spending grant funds, on imaginary camps which aren't there?

I don't think these problems will be difficult for you, but they're a part of the political picture. Plus the very obvious fact that you will have on your neck a lot of people who are determined to keep up the pretense that this is a beautiful piece of international co-operation whereby American living standards are being grafted on the peons of Mexico and whereby we are saving crops that are threatened by drastic destruction. This is a myth. It has cost millions of dollars to build it and maintain it. You start messing around with real research techniques into that myth and you are going to have the opposition of these people. However, you will have the support and sympathy of many people throughout the country who will be all for it, and will encourage you and will give you support when you need it.

You can rest assured that the braceros won't be here indefinitely, for this very simple reason. The corporation farmers of the state of California, for a hundred years have seen to it that the labor force remained chaotic and under constant turnover. If by any chance the same braceros were to remain in employment in California for 3 or 4 or 5 years and became familiar with our ways of doing things, and began to get a little wise, and occasionally stood up for their rights under the contract, the growers themselves would take care of it to see that these people didn't stay here very much longer. There is nothing you or I

can do to insure these people would remain here permanently employed. The minute that they become accustomed to the American concept as far as standards of fairness and equity and procedure are concerned--at that particular point they will become undesirable and a new labor force of green, undefended, inarticulate people will be brought in.